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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINR EAID SOCI RS
SUBJECT: BATTLING CORRUPTION: RUSSIA NEEDS TIME FOR PROGRESS

REF: MOSCOW 01689

Classified By: Political Internal Chief Robert Patterson for reason 1.4
(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a July 9 meeting, Transparency International-Russia's (TI-R) General Director Yelena Panfilova outlined to us a new USG-funded program for combating corruption in Russia, focused on public education and strengthening rule of law. Panfilova believes the Russians are changing in their views on corruption, notwithstanding official inaction. In addition to Medvedev's initiatives, Panfilova pointed to five key Duma members from three different parties as possible allies whom TI-R could quietly influence. Panfilova believed that the GOR, given time to develop strategies for fighting graft and opportunities for implementing ground-level projects, appears interested in and capable of progress. End Summary.

TI-R Head Cautiously Optimistic

¶12. (C) Yelena Panfilova, General Director for Transparency International-Russia's (TI-R) Center for Anti-Corruption Research and Initiative in Russia, told us July 9 about TI-R's proposal to establish an Anti-corruption helpdesk and online office (AHOO), to be based in Moscow and seven regional centers. TI-R designed AHOO as an online source for anti-corruption education and public awareness as well as a virtual legal advice center. Panfilova envisioned that in the first year of the program, victims of corruption in Russia would be able to report their problems on a designated TI-R website, after which TI-R would catalogue the complaints for future trend analysis and official documentation, should the victims pursue legal action. USG, through USAID, is providing the initial start-up funding for the information database. In the subsequent two years, TI-R planned to open helpdesk centers in several regions where senior TI-R staff could provide consultations to those interested in filing official complaints or even pursuing legal action against officials. Panfilova told us that she believes Russians will embrace the anti-corruption programs, given Russians' collective exhaustion from battling corrupt officials and the recent publicity surrounding Medvedev's anti-corruption initiatives. She thought supporters inside and outside of Russia should focus on technical programs such as AHOO instead of entertaining expectations of large-scale governmental reform.

¶13. (C) Panfilova was optimistic that Russia was on the cusp of a gradual change in attitudes toward corruption. Medvedev's background as a lawyer, as well as his impatience with corruption and legal nihilism in Russia, were harbingers of change. Drawing a parallel to Putin's success in realizing his year 2000 inauguration promise to end the conflict in Chechnya, Panfilova predicted that Medvedev could succeed in building support for the rule of law and reducing corruption. Panfilova conceded that past anti-corruption efforts have

focused on low- and mid-level officials, and on efforts to combat petty bribery, instead of targeting top officials. However, she believed that building a platform for public awareness and legal knowledge was a precursor to needed legislative reform.

¶4. (C) Despite resistance to criminal penalties from Russia's elites in the past, Panfilova has found solid allies in the Duma. In particular, she applauded United Russia party member Mikhail Grishankov, citing his intellectual curiosity and strength of character. She also singled out United Russia's Vladislav Reznik and Yurii Vasiliev, Fair Russia's Gennady Gudkov, and the Communist Party's Viktor Ilyukhin. All five are former law enforcement officials. These legislators, among others, have demonstrated interest in learning about anti-corruption regulation organizations outside of Russia, including the Office of Public Ethics in the United States - a favorable sign for future action in the Duma. Panfilova thought that she and her legal team at TI-R could quietly influence future anti-corruption legislation in Russia because of her connections and anti-corruption credentials. Panfilova additionally noted that Medvedev's proposals to reduce red tape for small and medium businesses in Russia could discourage corrupt practices by government officials.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) If he is serious about corruption, Medvedev is navigating uncharted waters, and serious efforts to combat Russia's oldest profession will inevitably collide with the interests of some at the very peak of power in Russia. Although polls and casual conversations suggest that Russians are tired of paying "on the left," their fatigue has not translated into anything approaching a popular movement against the practice of, say, bribe-taking by traffic policemen. For the time being, most of our contacts are either skeptical that Medvedev is serious, or believe that, if serious, the President is virtually guaranteed to fail. Still, Panfilova is a longtime and shrewd observer of the comings and goings of anti-corruption initiatives. Her guarded optimism this time around is cause for some hope.

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